

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release April 7, 1976

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### INTERIOR RETURNS MANAGEMENT OF PACIFIC WALRUS TO STATE OF ALASKA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to allow the State of Alaska to manage the Pacific walrus. Under the State's management plan, sport hunting of about 100 animals will be authorized.

This final action came in the Federal Register notice published April 5, 1976, announcing the agency's decision to waive a provision of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 which normally prohibits sport hunting of the species--but provides for a waiver of the moratorium based on the best scientific evidence available.

The decision was made in response to a State request, after careful study of the possible impact on the walrus population. The Act required that a management plan be submitted by the State and be approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition to waiving the moratorium, the decision returns management responsibility for the 140,000-200,000 walrus herd to the State. Implementation of the waiver will be monitored continuously by the Service to assure compliance with the Act.

The Service Director, Lynn A. Greenwalt, said the waiver of the moratorium on harvesting is expected to have minimal effect on the total walrus population.

Current annual harvest of Pacific walrus is estimated to be about 1,700 animals which traditionally have been used for Native subsistence purposes.

Greenwalt estimated that once the waiver is implemented, approximately 100 additional walrus would be added to the total annual harvest figure.

Prior to the Director's decision, an environmental assessment was completed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, and administrative hearings were conducted in Alaska and Washington, D.C., by an administrative law judge. Testimony was received from proponents and opponents of the waiver and the Marine Mammal Commission. On July 10, 1975, Administrative Law Judge Joseph B. Kennedy of the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Department of the Interior, recommended that the waiver be approved. After the State of Alaska's management plan was reviewed, the judge's recommendation was implemented.